

This fishy story has a biting edge

By MIKE SCANLON

The fish were really biting at Newburgh Lake last Saturday.

Just ask Chuck Sturm. "It only takes 10 minutes to get (to the lake), and 10 minutes to get back," said Sturm, who spends most summer Saturdays fishing from a public pier. "You can get anything in that god-damned lake. You can get pike, you can get smallmouth and bigmouth, crappies, all different colored carp."

And piranhas. That's piranha, as in *The Thing That Ate Chicago*. Latin speakers might call this particular beauty a fine example of *Rooseveltella Mattereri*.

Last Saturday, Sturm was fishing for crappie in Newburgh Lake in Hines Park when he hooked, fought and finally lapped a 7-inch piranha. Pibatorial experts will tell you piranhas are silvery fish, whose chunky, bluegill-like bodies are tinged with red across the belly, throat and fins.

The fish are found in abundant numbers in South American river basins, especially the Amazon, the Orinoco and

the Parana.

Note that Newburgh Lake is not on the list.

"It put up a hell of a fight," said Sturm, who was using ultra-light tackle and spent about four minutes grappling with the fish before finally hoisting up onto the pier. It flopped around for a while and finally — a few seconds too late — shook off the minnow-baited long-shanked hook that kept it from chewing through the light line.

The fight did not end on the pier. "When I got it in the basket, it started chewing on the steel mesh," said Sturm. "It was a lot meaner than the last one."

WHEN STURM'S bobber took off across the lake like an unlimited hydroplane in a Gold Cup race, he might have been excited, but he wasn't especially surprised. Catching piranhas is getting to be old hat for Sturm.

He pulled in his first one from the same pier three weeks ago, and last Friday a fishing buddy caught another one.

Piranhas are voracious, schooling

fish that thrive on two things: Warm, tropical waters, and victims.

"They'll eat anything. Even mammals," said Hank Augustyn, supervisor at the Belle Isle aquarium.

Piranhas are ideally suited to do this. Natives in South America use dried piranha jawbones as tools and cutting implements, Augustyn said.

"Those teeth are really sharp," he said.

Augustyn said fish fanciers in more temperate climates pay up to \$30 for especially large specimens of piranhas, and Sturm's 7-inch qualifies as a fairly big piranha — their maximum length is about 12 inches, Augustyn said.

AUGUSTYN SAID there's no way the

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fish could survive a Michigan winter, and these particular specimens must have been introduced into Newburgh Lake sometime this summer.

"They're strange fish," Sturm said. "They're beautiful, but they don't have any scales. They're like trout."

Guys who pull on waders and slip into icy streams armed with willowy flyrods might disagree.

Sturm's first piranha was sold for \$5 to a woman in a bar on Newburgh Lake. That happened after a fellow patron told Sturm the fishing was lousy in the lake. All you can catch in there is carp, said the man.

Ten bucks says you get piranha in there, said Sturm, who had one waiting patiently out in the car. You can visualize the rest.

Anyway, the piranha is now making itself at home in Mary Henshall's bedroom. Mary's 19-year-old brother, Bud, was with Sturm when the fish was caught. The piranha is in a small aquarium, probably lonely by now, and probably gasping for breath.

The Henshall's don't normally keep tropical fish laying around the house, and the aquarium isn't equipped with an air system.

The Henshalls are very interested, by the way, in dumping the piranha — it hasn't touched its food since last Saturday. Nightcrawlers, crickets, hamburger, nothing looks appetizing anymore.

The pet shop said they wouldn't take it because it was too big. When they get that big you have to keep them in separate tanks," said Mary's mother, Margo Henshall. The family is hoping to give it some public animal display, preferably the Nature Center on Hines Drive a mile or so from where the fish was caught.

IT LOOKS LIKE Sturm is going to be cheated out of his award for catch-

ing the fish, by the way.

Dave Borgeson, assistant chief of the state Department of Natural Resources fisheries division, says Sturm's catch is the first time he's ever heard of a Michigan angler taking a piranha in local waters. That would seem to mean Sturm has a state record fish, which would qualify him for a highly-prized, Master Angler patch.

But no. "We don't keep records on piranha," said Borgeson, a little huffily.

How Jews live in Egypt, Iran

"Jewish Communities in Distress" is the theme of a lecture program to be presented at 8:30 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 18, in Congregation Bnai Moshe, 14390 10 Mile, Oak Park.

The speakers will be Henri Bizaoui, Israeli businessman who is chairman of the Committee of Jews from Arab Countries, and Dr. Firooz Banooi, Detroit gynecologist who is a native of Iran.



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